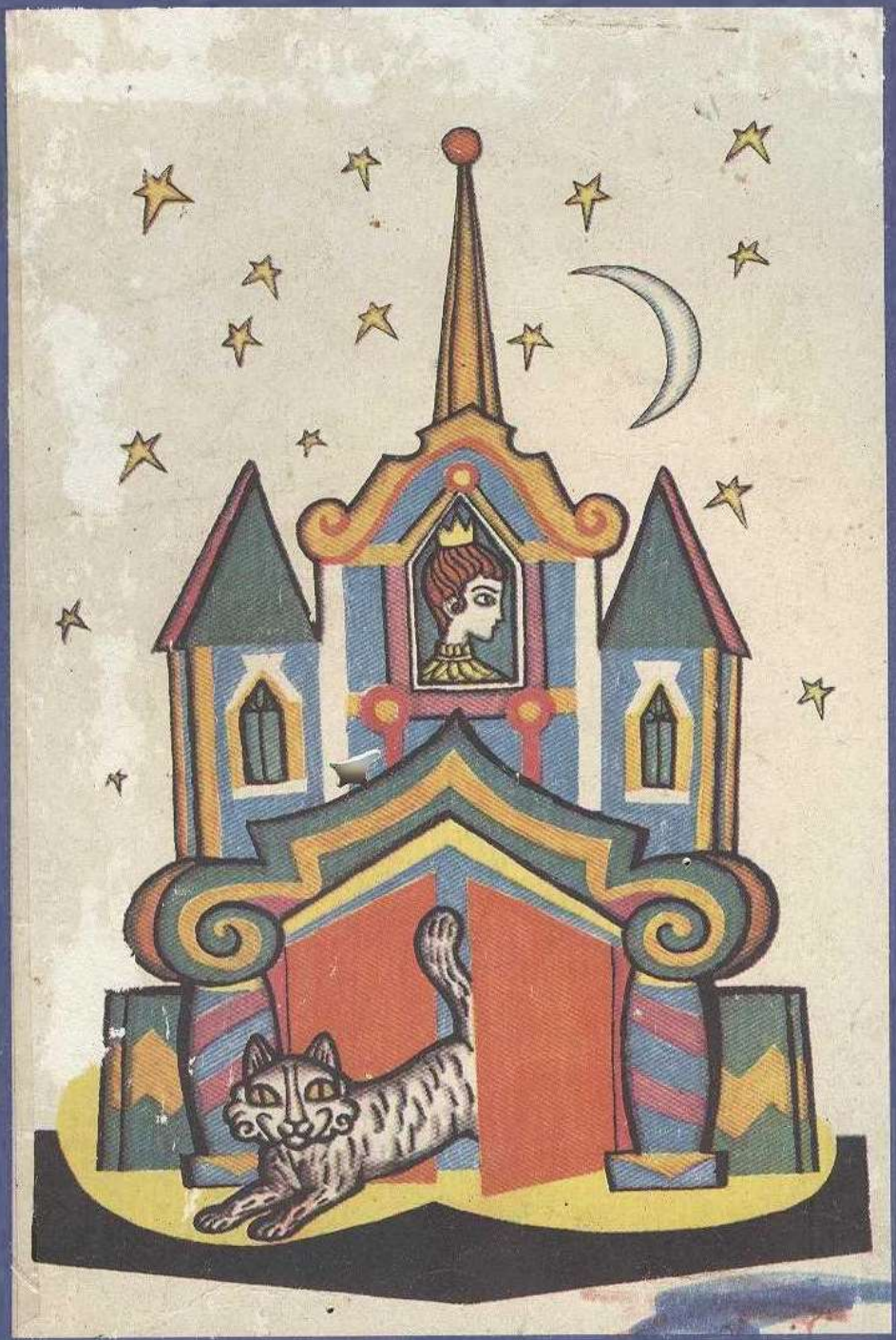

THE POOR LAD AND THE CRUEL PRINCESS

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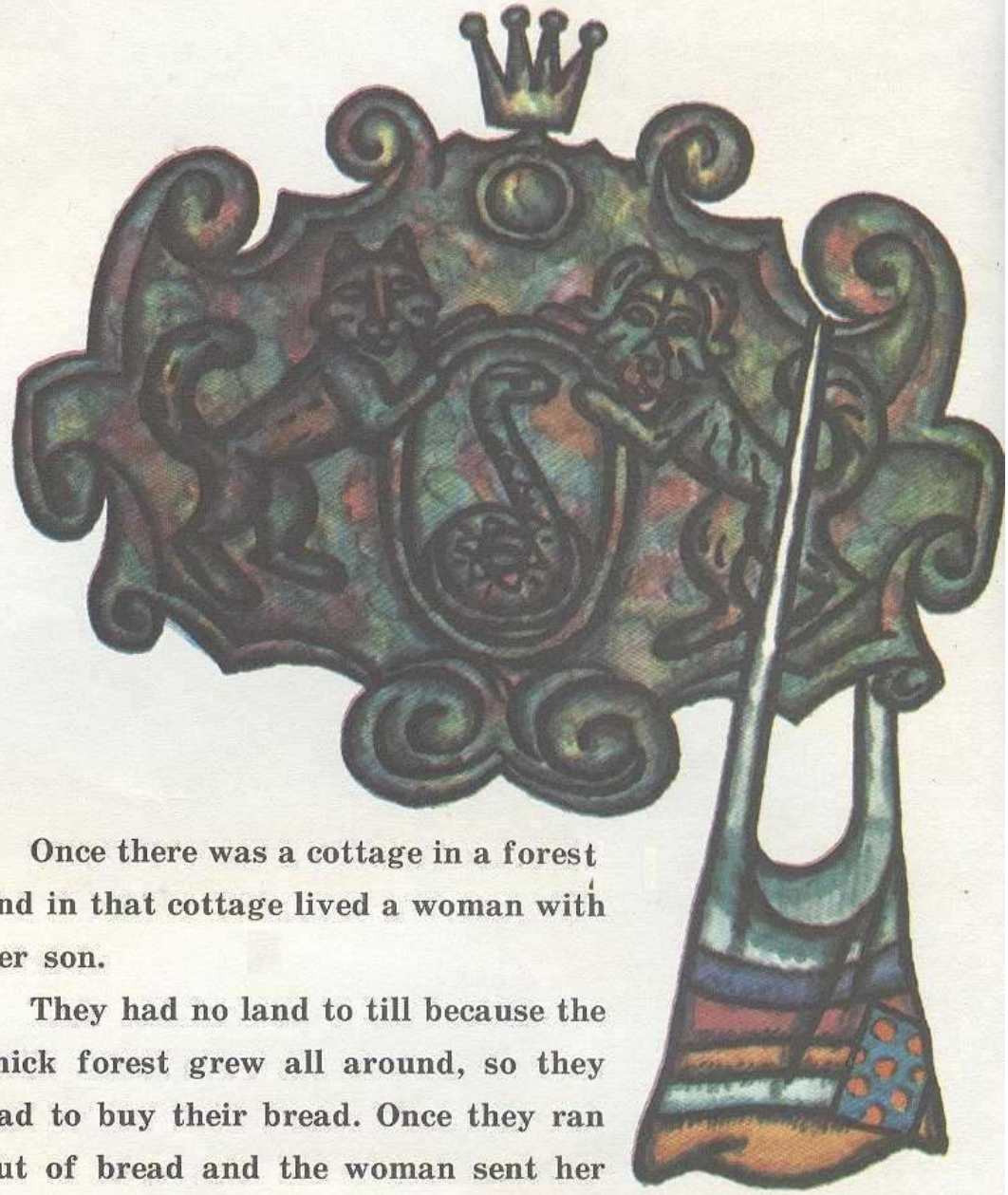
THE POOR LAD AND THE CRUEL PRINCESS

Ukrainian Folk Tale

TRANSLATED FROM THE UKRAINIAN BY JOHN WEIR

ILLUSTRATED BY YULI KRYHA

KIEV DNIPRO PUBLISHERS 1980



Once there was a cottage in a forest and in that cottage lived a woman with her son.

They had no land to till because the thick forest grew all around, so they had to buy their bread. Once they ran out of bread and the woman sent her son to buy some.

"Here you are, son," said she, "take this money and go and buy some bread."

The son took the money and went. He walked and he walked, and then he saw a man leading a dog.

"Good morning!" he said politely.

"Good morning!" the man answered.

"Where are you leading the dog?"

"I'm taking it to the forest to hang it," said the man, "because the dog is old and not good for anything any more."

"Please don't hang it. Sell it to me instead."

"So buy it."

"How much do you want for it?"

"How much will you give?"

The young man gave him all the money that his mother had given him to buy bread with, and took the dog and led it home. When he came home, his mother asked him:

"Well, son, did you buy bread?"

"No, mother, I didn't."

"Why not?"

"Because as I was walking I saw a man leading a dog to be hanged, so I bought it off him."

His mother gave him some more money and sent him out again for bread. He walked, and then he saw a man carrying a cat.

"Good morning!"

"Good morning!"

"Where are you going?"

"I'm taking the cat to the forest."

"Why are you taking it to the forest?"

"To hang it. I can't keep anything in the house because of that cat. I no sooner put anything down than it's gone, no matter what."

"Why don't you sell it to me?"

"Buy it."

"How much do you want for it?"

"I won't bargain with you. I'll take whatever you give."

So the young man gave him the money which his mother had given him to buy bread, took the cat and went home. When he came, his mother asked:

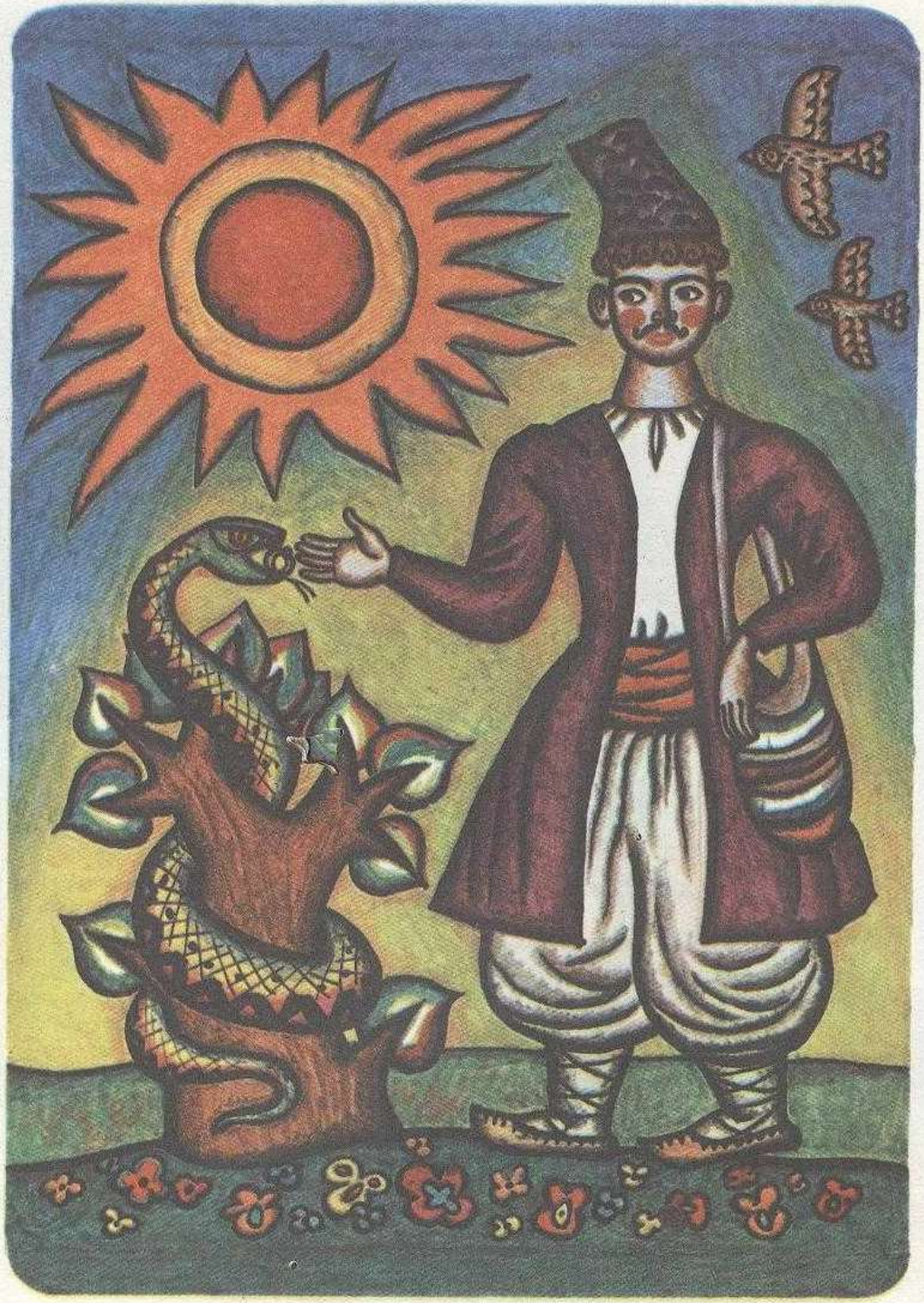
"And where is the bread?"

"I didn't buy any."

"Why didn't you? What did you do with the money? Did you buy something else with it?"

"I did," he told her.

"Why did you?"



"A man was carrying a cat to the forest, where he intended to hang it, and I felt such great pity for the cat, that I went and bought it."

"Here is some more money, but see that you don't buy some other thing again, because we haven't got a scrap of bread in the house."

So he went, and he walked and he walked, and then he saw a man beating a snake with a stick.

"Why are you beating the snake? Sell it to me instead."

"Buy it," said the man, "I'm willing to sell."

"How much must I pay you?"

"Whatever you give will be good enough."

So the young man gave him all his money. The man took it and went away.

Then the snake said:

"Thank you, kind soul, for saving me from death. Take this ring. If you should want anything, just toss it from one hand to the other, and servants will immediately rush to serve you.

No matter what you may tell them to do, whatever you may think up, they'll do it for you."

He took the ring and went home. When he was near the cottage, he tossed the ring from one hand to the other, and lo and behold! many servants appeared.

"Get me bread," he told them. He had no sooner spoken, than they already had piles of loaves there for him... He entered the cottage and said:

"We will never have to buy bread any more, mother. A snake gave me such a ring, which you must toss from one hand to the other and at once servants come rushing up. No matter what I tell them to do, whatever I may think up, they'll do it, whatever it may be."

"Why did the snake give you that ring?"

"Because I rescued it from death. A man wanted to kill it,

and I bought it from him with the money you gave me for bread."

So they lived like that, and the dog and the cat lived with them. Whenever the young man wanted anything, he simply tossed the ring from hand to hand, and servants rushed up and did whatever was wanted. The time came when he wanted to get married. He told his mother:

"Mama, go and ask the princess to become my wife."

She went to the princess and told her why she came, and the princess said to her:

"If your son will make a pair of slippers that will fit my feet exactly, I will marry him."

She came home and told her son:

"The princess said that if you will make slippers for her which will fit her feet perfectly, she will be your wife."

"Good," he said "I'll make those slippers."

That evening the son went out into the yard, tossed the ring from one hand to the other, and immediately the servants gathered. He told them:

"By morning I must have slippers sewn with gold thread and soled with silver, and those slippers must fit the feet of the princess."

When he arose the following morning, the slippers were ready, standing on the table. The mother took the slippers to the princess.

She tried them on — and they fit her feet exactly. So she said:

"Tell your son to sew me a wedding dress in one night, and that it should be neither long nor short, and neither tight nor loose, but should fit me exactly."

The woman came home and said:

"The princess said that in one night you must sew her a wedding dress that should be neither long nor short, tight nor loose, but a perfect fit."

"Good, mother," he said. "Now you go to sleep and I'll do everything that she asked me to."

When everybody had retired for the night, he went into the yard, tossed the ring from one hand to the other, and immediately a horde of servants appeared.

"I must have a dress by morning," he said, "of cloth that shines like the sun, and that dress must be neither long nor short, tight nor loose, but a perfect fit."

"Good, it shall be done."

He went to bed. When he rose in the morning he told his mother:

"Well, mama, go to the princess and take the dress. What will she say now?"

"I'll take it, son, but where is the dress?"

"Here is the dress on the table under the kerchief, mother. Take it to her."

He went up to the table and lifted up a kerchief — and the house grew radiant as though the sun had risen.

She took the dress and carried it to the princess. When she arrived, the princess asked her:

"What have you to tell us, good woman?"

"I have brought you your wedding dress."

When she unwrapped the dress, the palace chambers shone as if dazzling lights had been lit. The princess put the dress on, stood before the mirror and took a look at herself, and then skipped with delight, because she looked so lovely in it. She walked across the chamber one way and then the other, and her dress shone just like the sun.

"Well, good woman," she said, "let him build me a paved road from my palace to the church where we are to be wed, and let that road be of silver and gold. When the road is ready, then we will be married."

The woman came home and said to her son:

"The princess said that there must be a road paved from the palace where she lives to the church. She said that you must make that pavement of gold and silver."

"Fine, mother," he said, "now lie down and have a rest."

When all had retired for the night, he went out into the yard, tossed the ring from one hand to the other, and so many servants came that there was hardly room for them all in the yard. And he told them:

"By morning I must have a road paved with silver and gold from the princess' palace to the church where we are to be wed. When the princess and I will drive down that road, let apple trees, pear trees and cherry trees blossom on both sides. And when we will be driving back to the palace, let all the fruits be ripe already."

"Good," they said. "By morning it will be as you say."

When he rose in the morning and went outside, he saw the paved road with blossoming orchards on both sides. So he returned to the house and told his mother:

"Go and tell the princess, mama, that the road is ready, and let her prepare for the wedding."

The mother went to the princess and told her, and the princess said:

"I have seen the road already and it is a very fine one. Tell your son to come and take me to the wedding tomorrow."

The woman came home and said to her son:

"The princess tells you to drive her to the wedding tomorrow."

During the night he had a fine palace built for himself, and the following day he drove to the church and married the princess. As they were returning along the road, on either side there

were ripe apples and pears and cherries and every other kind of fruit that there is on the earth...

They came to his new palace and held their wedding feast and then lived there together. The dog and the cat lived with them, too. They had lived there for some time, when the princess once asked her husband:

"Tell me, my dear, how did you make those slippers and that dress for me, since you never took any measurements? How did you build such a road in one night, and where did you get all the gold and silver?"

"I have such a ring," he told her, "that if you toss it from one hand to the other, the yard is immediately filled with servants. They do anything I tell them. They made the slippers and the dress, and they built the road and also this palace where we live. They do everything for me."

"Where do you place that ring for the night, my dear?"

"I put it under my pillow, so it shouldn't be stolen," he told her.

So she waited until he was sound asleep, then she quietly found the ring and tossed it from one hand to the other, and at once a horde of servants gathered.

She commanded them:

"Get me horses and a large coach immediately. I am going to my brother's palace across the ocean. And make this palace into a tower, but such a one that my husband could only stand up and lie down in it. See that he awakens only after he is inside the tower."

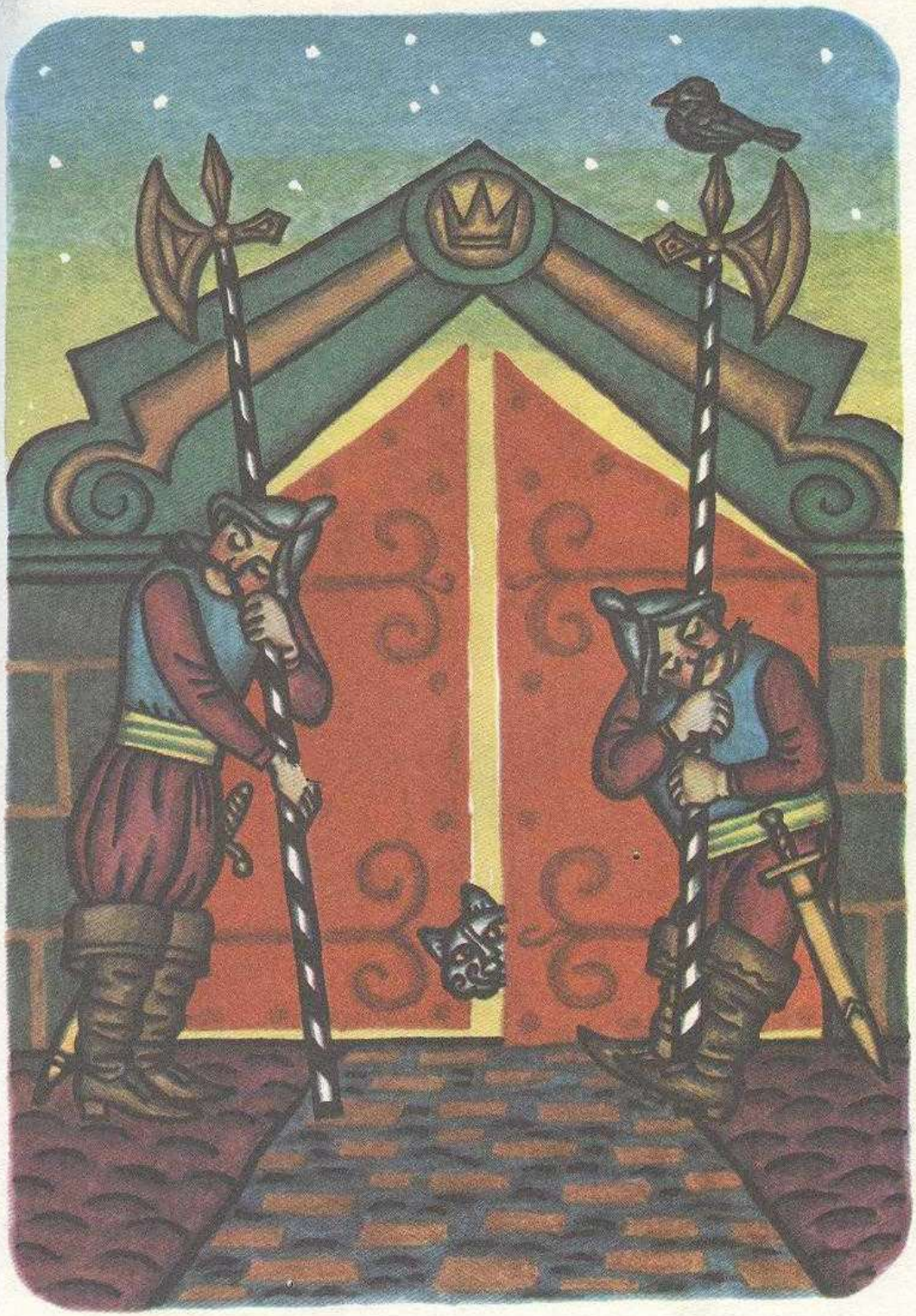
"Good," they said, "everything shall be done as you say."

She went out and the coach was already there. She entered it and drove off.

At that instant the palace became a tall tower.

The princess' husband awoke early the next morning, and lo! there was no wife, no palace, no ring — there was nothing, only the tower and he was inside it. He tried to walk out of it, but there were no doors. He explored one wall, then another, but there was no way out, just a tiny window in the wall. So there the poor fellow was, with nobody even to bring him any food. He would have perished if it had not been for the dog and the cat.

The dog would run to the fields, steal a piece of bread from the lunch-bag of some farmer, and bring it to the tower, and the cat would take the bread in its teeth, climb up to the window



and give it to him. They gathered up a little store of bread that way, and the dog said to the cat:

"Our master has bread now, so let us go to the sea and try to get the ring back somehow."

"Let us go," agreed the cat.

So they went. They ran and they ran, until they reached the sea. Then the cat climbed on the dog's back and they swam away. They swam a long time, until they finally reached the other shore. They climbed out of the water and sunned themselves a little while, and then the cat said:

"You remain here by the sea, while I run to the palace. If I get hold of the ring I will run here as fast as I can, so that we should get right back and not be caught."

"Good," said the dog, "go to the palace."

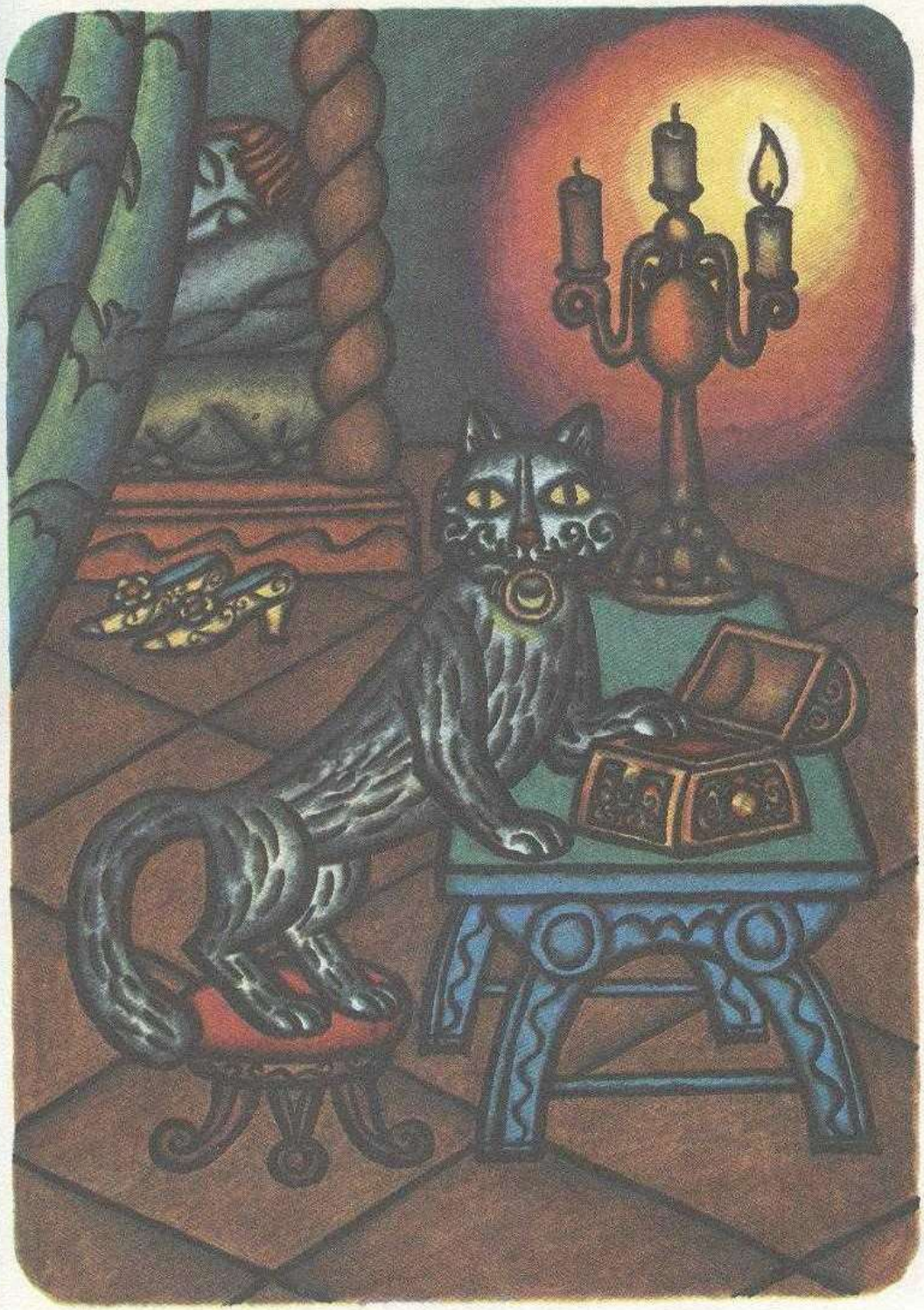
The cat ran off. He ran and he ran, he ran and he ran, without ever stopping to rest, only running and running. Then he looked and there was the palace with a guard standing by. The cat got into the courtyard and ran about in it. The princess happened to look out the window and saw the cat running around the yard. She carried it into her chambers.

When all had retired for the night, the cat seized the ring and ran off. It came to the sea in a rush and leapt onto the dog's back, and the dog jumped into the water, and they swam away.

In the middle of the sea the cat opened its mouth to say something to the dog, and dropped the ring.

When they had crossed the sea, the dog asked:

"Where is the ring?"



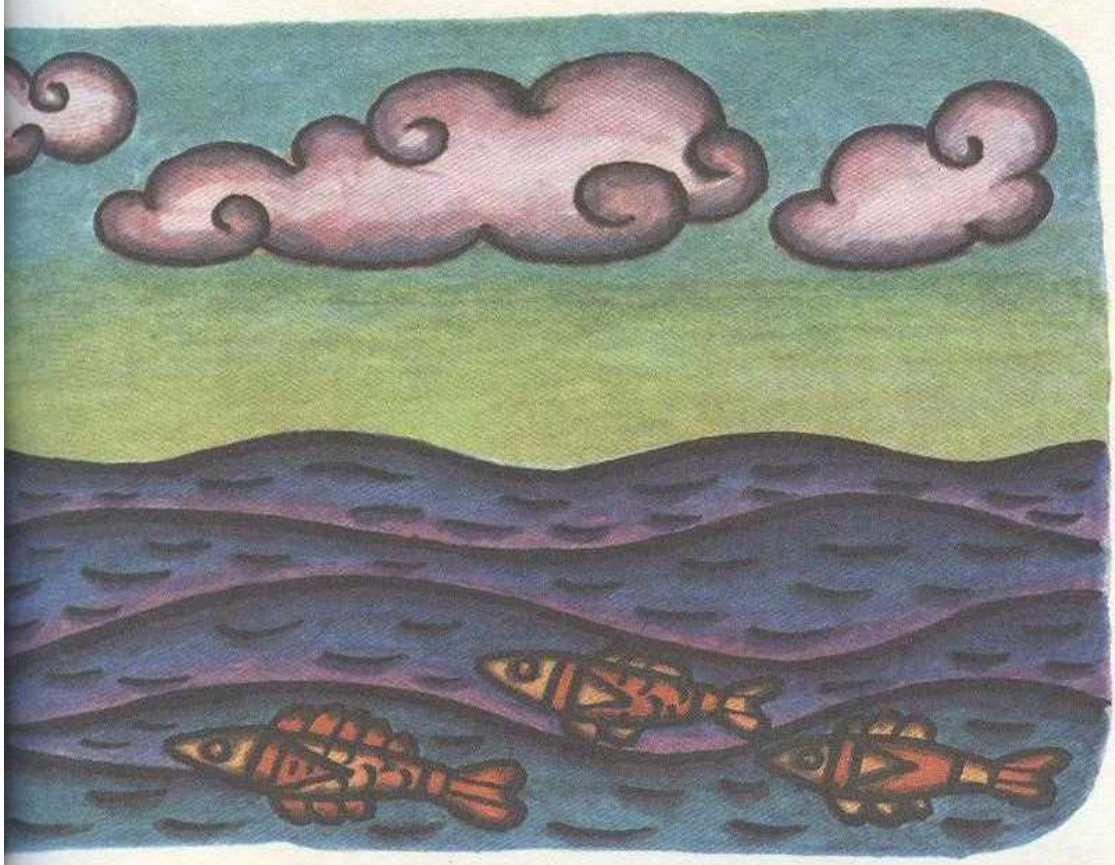
"I had it," said the cat, "but it's gone now."

"How could it be gone? Did they take it away from you?"

"Nobody even chased after me. I stole the ring in the night, and I ran away in the night, and nobody knew where I was going. Then I ran up to you and we started to swim across the sea. But when we were already in the middle of it, I opened my mouth to tell you to swim faster, and I dropped the ring."

"What shall we do now?"

"What can we do? Let us walk along the seashore and maybe we'll find someone to get it for us from the bottom of the sea."



So they sunned themselves a little while, and then walked along the shore. They asked everybody they met and everybody they saw whether they would get them the ring from the sea, or whether they knew anybody who could do it. But they didn't find anybody of that sort. Finally, the cat said:

"You know what? Let us walk along the shore and choke frogs and crayfish. Whichever one tells us that it will bring us the ring, that one we'll let go."

"Good," said the dog, "let us go."

So they went. They would catch a frog and ask:

"Answer quickly! Will you bring us the ring from the sea?"

"I know where your ring is. Just let me go, and I will bring it to you."

But as soon as they let it go, it would swim away and not even give a thought to the ring. At first the frogs were afraid of them, and then they weren't any longer. Whenever one fell into their hands it immediately said, "I'll bring the ring," and they let it go.

They were walking beside the sea one evening when they saw a tiny froglet hopping.

They caught it and asked:

"Do you know where the ring lies in the sea?"

"I don't... croak, croak."

"If you don't, then we will kill you."

And they began to choke the froglet. Seeing this, and old frog — as big as a bucket! — came up out of the water and said:

"Leave my child alone, I will bring you the ring from the sea."

"Good," they said, "we will hold it until you bring it to us, and when you bring us the ring we will let your child go."

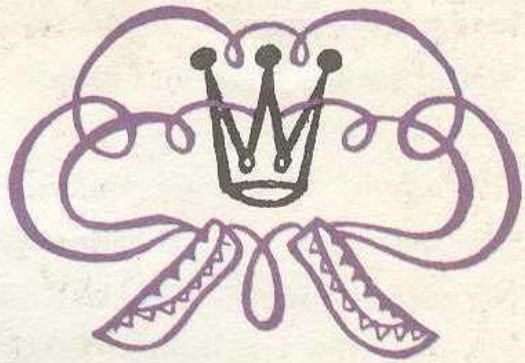
The big frog dived into the sea, found the ring and gave it to them. They took the ring, let the froglet go free, and ran to the tower. They came to their master and found that he had finished all the bread and had gone without a bite to eat for two days — he had become as thin as a rail. The cat crawled up to the window and gave him the ring. He tossed it from

one hand to the other and immediately masses of servants appeared.

"Tear down this tower," he told them, "and let my palace stand here again, and let my wife be brought here without a moment's delay."

No sooner had he said it, than it was done.

He drove away his wife, the treacherous princess, and lived in the palace with his mother, the cat and the dog, and later he married a girl who was poor but faithful.



О БЕДНОМ МОЛОДЦЕ И ЦАРЕВНЕ

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